

Commentary on Proposed FCC Rulemaking (Minority Ownership of Television Stations)

I am strongly in favor of the expansion of minority and female ownership (hereafter referred to as minority ownership) and am conversely opposed to the relaxation of regulations that will have a further dissipating affect on minority ownership in the media and more specifically minority ownership of television stations.

The current demographic setting of minority media ownership of television stations in the United States is pathetic. The FCC has forgotten or chosen not to hear the words of Abraham Lincoln that still echo through the hollow, law-making chambers of this great country, “. . . of the people, by the people, for the people” These words have obviously been forgotten by the FCC because there exists a multitude of people that are not being represented by their government and are subsequently not welcome to join in the panoply of voices, in the symphony of debate, or in the revolution of ideas via television ownership.

The FCC, through its pro-consolidation/deregulation policies, has segregated a large percent of the U.S. population and has created a pallid gentlemen’s club of sorts where the only way for non-white males to gain access is through the servants’ entrance. But do not take

my word for it, just look around and you will find that the proof is in the pudding.

According to a study by Derek Turner entitled, “*Out of the Picture: Minority & Female TV Ownership in the United States*,” there is an enormous disparity between minority television ownership and white male ownership. According to Mr. Turner’s study, women comprise approximately 51% of the U.S. population and yet only own a mere 4.97% of the television stations. So, to elucidate this disparity even further, let us imagine a chorus of 100 voices. In that chorus, there are 95 men and almost 5 women. Unfortunately, in this analogy, the women do not even have the amplification equipment to make their voices even close to as powerful as the male voices. The resulting sound of this chorus is that the female voices are drowned out and overpowered by a uniform male sound that envelops the masses.¹

What would the United States be like with more female owners of television stations? What would be the difference in the kind of issues discussed? If women owned more television stations would there be more or less gratuitous violence and sex on television? Would women be marginalized as much as they are now? I wonder if there would be more or less information on the issues surrounding women. One can only wonder because it seems as though no one is doing

¹ Turner, Derek. *Out of the Picture: Minority & TV Ownership in the United States*. Free Press. (October, 2006), available at http://www.stopbigmedia.com/files/out_of_the_picture.pdf

anything to change the lack of balance of power between women and male owners of the television medium.

Let us not only focus on women but let us also focus on minorities. According to Derek Turner's study 33% of the U.S. population is comprised of minorities and yet minorities own a whopping 3.26 percent of the television stations.² This number is shocking and shatters my perception that race relations in this country have come a long way. Apparently, the U.S. has been awoken from the dream that was once shared with Martin Luther King, and that dream has been discounted, disregarded, and eroded away by the lack of care and oversight by the FCC. The situation is not getting better it is getting worse. In fact, Derek Turner's study reveals that, "pro-consolidation policies enacted by the FCC in the late 1990s had a significant impact on minority ownership, indirectly or directly contributing to the loss of 40 percent of the stations that were minority-owned in 1998."³ Through the FCC's promulgation of the lessening of restrictions on media ownership, and more specifically, television ownership, the voices of minorities are being washed over and drowned out.

The point is abundantly clear that a certain group of people (white males) own most of the television stations. But why is it

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

important to halt the dissipation of minority ownership of television stations you ask? First of all, let's back up a minute. The average American watches approximately three hours of television per day. That means that the average American is devoting approximately one eighth of their lives to television viewing since there are only 24 hours in a day. So, suffice it to say, television is a medium that is given a great amount of attention by Americans. Furthermore, the attention that is given to television probably results in the viewer's absorption of information, information that is being controlled by the stations. Now, the second important question is who are the people that are controlling television stations? The answer to that question from a demographic perspective has already been answered above, white males. The third question is, do the owners of television stations have an affect on the content of what television stations are broadcasting? Also, if television station owners do have an affect on the content of the broadcasts, (which is probably the case), will they adequately represent the voices of others who are not like them? If they do not adequately represent the voices of those, other than themselves, then there is going to be a lopsided promulgation of information that is not in proportion to the demographics of this country and surely will have a deleterious affect on the marketplace of ideas.

It is imperative that the FCC takes a new course of action immediately. It is of the utmost importance that the FCC ceases its policy of deregulation, for without the protection of regulation it will only be a matter of time before minority media ownership is almost non-existent.

The responsibility of the expansion of minority ownership through the promulgation of regulations that encourage minority ownership rests with the FCC. As the FCC is abundantly aware, many forms of electronic media are constrained by a spectrum, including television, and because of the limitation of that spectrum, the FCC has been delegated special authority to regulate that spectrum. So, since there is a disparity in minority ownership of television stations, and the FCC promulgates rules to television stations, then it rests with the FCC to try to implement rules that will encourage more diverse television ownership rather than relaxing rules on conglomerate media ownership that are inimical to the expansion of minority ownership amongst television stations.

In conclusion, this is a country made of many people who have many viewpoints. It is imperative to the “market places of ideas” that the viewpoints and voices of all people are afforded an opportunity to be seen and heard. At this moment in time there exists a great disparity on who controls those voices and viewpoints that are able to

be seen and heard on television. The FCC must reexamine its pro-consolidation/deregulation policies, policies that are resulting in a tumorous disparity between white male television station owners and minorities. Furthermore, the FCC must adopt a policy structure that will allow for a balance to be reached that more closely aligns television station ownership with the demographics of this great country.